

Synopsis: Ten years in the making, *The Elephant Queen* defies genre as a blue-chip wildlife film with a character-driven narrative. It is an epic journey following the matriarch, Athena, as she leads her herd across the merciless savanna in a time of extreme drought. Directors Victoria Stone and Mark Deeble and their assistant director, Etienne Oliff, were committed to making sure the film had a positive impact on wild elephant conservation in Kenya as well as engaging a broad, global audience.

Case Study

The Elephant Queen

(2019) 96 minutes



Creative Design: The *The Elephant Queen* team set out to create a timeless and accessible film that engages and inspires a broad audience who may not already be inspired by the natural world. They designed the film to immerse viewers into the world of an elephant family, taking them on an emotional journey that is a catalyst for positive action. The story reflects the interconnectivity in the natural world, weaving the lives of elephants with the animals that live at elephant toenail height. The camera was placed amidst the elephants, at eye level of adult and baby elephants alike as well as smaller wildlife, like frogs, terrapins and dung beetles. This creative approach enables viewers to experience the natural world from different perspectives, and provides a rare intimacy that inspires empathy. Deeble & Stone were careful to craft a narrative that let the story and visuals drive the film while interweaving substantial information. The lighter, humorous scenes strategically provide viewers levity and joy alongside the more poignant and heart-wrenching sequences. Small critters, such as dung beetles, starred in these comedic scenes and this entertaining element made the film more accessible to general audiences of all ages.

Collaborative Model: During production, the team collaborated extensively with individuals and organizations working in wildlife and conservation

education across Kenya. Early in production they set up and ran a 3-day workshop at the Kivukoni school in Kenya to ascertain what education and outreach tools would be most useful for communities and children in areas of high human-wildlife conflict. The workshop brought together wildlife and conservation educators, most of whom had not met before. New affiliations and relationships have since developed. The team have collaborated closely with leading organizations in Kenya such as Wildlife Direct and Save the Elephants, extending their reach into communities. Apple supported their outreach vision by donating a percentage of each streaming of the film in 2019 to Wildlife Conservation Network for elephant conservation work in Kenya. The *The Elephant Queen* website and mobile cinema both promote and advertise a wide variety of wildlife/conservation organizations with whom the team is working. The website, elephant.co.ke, is only accessible in Kenya and the film itself is available free of charge to schools and communities within Kenya in English, Kiswahili and Maa. Outside of Kenya, the film is available on Apple TV+.

Outreach Strategies: Stone began fundraising



for the outreach and education campaign at the outset of the project, considering its impact in Kenya as important as reaching the global audience. Using what they learned from the collaborative workshop, the team created extensive educational materials housed on a Kenya-based website with four primary sections. The “Discover Elephants” section showcases a series of short, entertaining yet educational films available in Kiswahili, Maa, and English with information that goes beyond the film itself. These are accompanied by activity books and a guide for educators. The website also includes interviews with leading Kenyan elephant experts to inspire local youth toward careers in wildlife conservation. It also contains a series of podcasts created from Deeble’s field production blogs and light-hearted infographics full of fun facts.

In the “Teaching Resources” page, they developed a series of 28 learn-to-read books based on animals in the film. Educational consultants worked alongside their talented writer, illustrator and watercolorist. The team commissioned three school plays written for various age levels to inspire engaging discussions on the natural world. The “Elephant Crisis” section provides opportunities and resources to learn about the issues and get involved with Kenya-based conservation organizations. The site was designed primarily for mobile use to accommodate users without access to computers and high bandwidth. The website, elephant.co.ke, is only accessible in Kenya with all materials available free of charge. The film itself is available for free to schools and communities within Kenya in English, Kiswahili and Maa. Outside of Kenya, the film is available on Apple TV+.

With their partners at Bestseller Foundation and Save the Elephants, they launched “The Elephant Queen Mobile Cinema” in 2021. Victoria Stone is the Executive Director of the Mobile Cinema and Outreach program, and the Kenya team includes Etienne Oliff as the Director and Mark Deeble as a Consultant. An all Kenyan outreach team will tour the truck across Kenya, with emphasis on areas of high human-wildlife conflict. The film and its supporting materials act as a conversation starter for Save the Elephants to build conservation capacity within communities. Another workshop will run for all community leaders to ensure they are conversant on the film and materials prior to the mobile cinema arrival in their area. The TEQ team is working with Vulcan Earthranger to map the tour and make it open source.

Measuring Impact: The Elephant Queen created a “National Moment” in Kenya with a free national broadcast on Easter Sunday 2020 on Kenya’s most popular TV station. On the day of the broadcast, the film became the highest trending topic on Twitter in Kenya. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the launch of the mobile cinema tour until 2021, but enabled the development of an impact assessment using a range of social science techniques. Dr. Harry Williams is working with Dr. Diogo Verissimo, Oxford University Research Fellow and Director for Conservation Marketing and Storytelling for On the Edge Conservation, and Dr. Lucy King at Save the Elephants to compare attitudes before, during and after screenings in remote communities of high human-wildlife conflict. The team intends to publish their findings in a scientific journal.